

Introduction

In the middle of writing this book, my entire life was upended by COVID-19. Daily routine (and sleep!) disrupted by emotions (fear, sadness and anger) and learning new behavior like wearing masks in public, spending endless hours on Zoom calls or WhatsApp with family and friends in Italy, Panama or UK, depending where the virus hit. At the same time living in a city like New York – the “ground zero” of the pandemic in US - gave me the chance to observe how society and individuals reacted to COVID-19 and to social issues like racial justice. Donate to organizations and individuals, helping distributing food or go to a march, even virtually, became a standard way to cope with the disruption for most people.

The pandemic indeed emphasized (or accelerated, as we say today) how the emotions guide our decisions and shape our behavior (for instance, fear influence social interactions). Also, like during other global crisis, humanity responded with generosityⁱ donating money or time to help others. But like in previous waves of activism and solidarity – Live Aid, the Tsunami in 2004 or Ice Bucket Challenge – the question is if this solidarity will continue. Can emotions not only ignite one off donation or mobilize people to participate in rallies, but can they also create long term supporters? Can we build on the initial emotional response and develop an army of advocates and fans in love with our causes, without the need of constantly soliciting them for their help or money?

We will never forget our days during the lockdown, and we will always remember that day of April 2019, when a huge fire erupted in Paris devastating Notre-Dame. It is one of the events that will be stamped in our memory forever. I remember ending a meeting and looking with incredulity at the photos on my social media in disbelief and shock. We all wanted to cry, show our pain and anger, share our precious moments of life in Paris. We all just need a relief, a way to help.

The paradox is that the response generated for Notre-Dame (\$1 billion pledged, more than \$300 million raised in few days), was too much and too late. The cathedral was desperate to get vital funds for repair and maintenance months before the fire. Friends of Notre-Dame appealed for funds repeatedly, but before the fire were able to secure only one third of the €60 million needed. Nicole Picaud, senior fundraiser for Notre Dame¹, lamented the paradoxical situation in which he has now more than three times the amount of money he originally asked for, but only after some of the features they wanted to repair have been destroyed forever!

The excess of money raised shows the power of emotional responses in other cases like the Australia fire in 2020 (where the money raised cannot be used as expected) or for the Black Lives Matter. When strong emotions are at play - like anger or fear, driven by a story in the media - it is difficult to predict how much money are needed or how and when the funds will be spent. Emotions are so strong that people respond with donations in minutes and expect to see their donations at work immediately, like a dollar transforming itself into justice or help, instantly and magically!

¹ <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/notre-dame-adviser-laments-frustrating-donations-only-came-after-fire-n994916>

And yet the question is if we need to see the fire from Notre-Dame, suffering koalas or the killing of another African American in the US to respond and act? Why can't we just donate a month or a year before a crisis or an accident happens – when we are already told there's a need?

The story of Notre Dame and the spectacular (and paradoxical) response generated is a good illustration of the dilemmas this book will try to address. Are emotions leading to a more empathic and altruistic behavior or are just a selfish response to our psychological need to feel better? Why are people more addicted to football clubs or iPhones than to charities? Do we need to appeal to radical and negative emotions and images to get attention and mobilize people to act?

We do not have the right tools or data to answer to these questions. For instance, if we consider the number of participants in #Fridaysforfuture marches inspired by Greta Thunberg or the money raised by #Metoo we could conclude easily that we are more generous and altruistic. Millions of people are taking the streets or are donating to help others, save the planet or address inequality. Therefore, we could infer, emotions lead to an increase in generosity and activism.

On the other side however, if we take a broader and wider perspective (considering for instance the last ten or twenty years), the number of people who donate or volunteer is declining in most countries and trust in NGOs has also dropped dramatically².

Furthermore, if we use donations as a proxy indicator of generosity and solidarity, we have a contradictory picture. Two identical campaigns in the U.S.– one to build a wall against migrants at the U.S./Mexico border and one to help those migrants – raised the same amount, more than \$20 million each. Therefore, are emotions neutral? Can they feed racism or enhance altruism at the same time?

The fact is that we still measure the **results** (money donated, number of “likes” received on Facebook, number of participants at a march) without knowing **why** people took these actions and therefore ignoring **if or how they will do it again**.

1. “Emotionraising” was a first step - based on evidence and research from neuroscience, behavioral economics, marketing and fundraising - to understand how people move from pure awareness of a need to an action like “donating” via a phone or giving a credit card to a canvasser in the street. This book has also been the first call to activists and fundraisers to embrace the emotional part of the brain (and not hide or run away from emotions) and to emphasize that messages and appeals based on emotions vs. those on statistics and logos are more effective in making people act and give.

One question the book left partly unanswered was however how we can keep alive the emotional flame that prompted the initial donations. In fact, we need to activate specific areas of the brain through several appeals and stories, so that powerful chemicals (including anticipated rewards like dopamine) are released to prompt and repeat a donation. However, these powerful parts of the brain (or System 1 as Kahneman would call it) have counterbalances.

² <https://blog.causeview.com/blog/fundraising/falling-donor-trust-is-a-major-problem-for-nonprofits>

- First, the mesolimbic part of the brain **assigns values** to the sensory stimuli³, helping us to classify what we feel. Based on this match with our concept of “fear” or “sadness” we decide what to do; in other words, it is not just pure instinctual or “irrational” action. Emotions like fear, sadness or disgust are also concepts. In a word, emotion are *made*, not only *experienced*. For example, our experience of fear or disgust – subconsciously - is a simulation of the appropriate way to react consciously
- Secondly, the action evoked or prompted by the emotional part of the brain is still mediated by the rational part through **values and learnings**. Therefore, if you are a Nazi, even if you prompted to act by the emotional part of the brain to help someone suffering, you are still able to numb down or ignore the response through your credo and values. Emotions are fundamental to get attention and prompt actions, but you still need to be able to recognize those emotions and assign a value to them to translate them in an action. You can donate to build a wall to stop migrants at the border or you can give money to help migrants at the border.
- More important, emotions - and the powerful associated chemicals released by the brain when we experience and respond to them - are **volatile**. We act pulled or pushed by powerful emotions and neurotransmitters released by our brain as we attribute a value to them; we feel better through our actions, like a donation, and then we move on, and we simply forget. It is not surprise that a significant number of donors - when asked why they do not donate anymore or why they unsubscribed from a charity - do not even remember to being a donor or to have ever supported that organization!
- Finally, understanding how emotions are made and formed, anticipated and created, how they are stored in a **memory** and become “feeling” (or a more conscious part of the experience) is a key to understand how we can solicit and ignite them without asking or soliciting, in other words how we can make people fall in love with the causes instead of feeling pressured or guilty.

The more neuroscience and behavioral economics progress, as well as the application of them through marketing (and fundraising), the more we are able to understand that the issue is not prompting or tempting more people to buy a product or to donate to a cause, but how to “hook them on a feeling” and a set of values and identities supporting this feeling that makes sense for them and the tribes (or groups) to which they belong.

³ Emotionraising and D>Hill

2. The other question that keeps me awake at night (in this period especially) is why people are more loyal to other experiences in life - like buying a pair of sneakers, visiting Disney Land or a watching a football club - than to charities? What distinguishes a supporter of a charity from a member of a religious sect or from a K-POP fan? I am not suggesting that business is better at selling nor I am questioning if a product is different from a donation. People love items, brands, teams, humans and spend or donate money on them. They also give time and take actions to things and people that bond them together. Why can't this also be a habit and a behavior for good causes? Charities and experts have researched the causes of "attrition" or the churning of donors over time (more than 50-70% people never do a repeat donation), but the answers are less tactical (a good welcome, a thank you letter, a report on how a donation was used) and more strategic. We are not loyal by nature or by habit, but by choice. The reasons why we are in love and loyal are, again, inside the brain and are related to the mechanisms we use to store memories forming our identities and values.

Here is a fascinating insight from neurosciences, also captured by advertising and marketing. There are complex and long-term reward mechanisms released by the brain (based on neurotransmitters like serotonin) linked to the areas that regulate the formation and storage of memory. A loyal or engaged customer, an art lover or a football fan have in part of their memory (hippocampus) elements that contribute to the release of subconsciously powerful feel good chemicals that reinforce the individual's sense of belonging and engagement with their team or the product they bought. In other words, they are linked to their identity. I am a male, father, teacher, liberal and supporter of Man U, for instance. Or a female, young, single, K pop fan. Or a Nike or Apple member. Those elements are related to "memorable experiences" that are defining the identity and behavior of individuals beyond the initial emotional engagement through the initial experience (buying a product, seeing a spot, going to a match or concert). Understanding better how memories are formed and how we can deliver memorable experiences is a key to understand how emotions (and the decisions they ignite) can last or die and how they can connect tribes and supporters around our causes, forever and not occasionally.

3. Supporting a cause and belonging to a movement are not just governed by different mechanisms in the brain. These identities are formed and experienced through different modalities. In the past showing your beliefs was easy: be it a member of a religion or political party, be it about giving money to a charity, signing a petition, volunteering, or going to a football march. These actions are ways of being active, but there are so many more.

Think about a vegan. He\she has so many ways to engage with the cause and values they believe in. Being vegan is about a lifestyle that does not cause suffering, harm or death to animals and to the planet. Therefore, your consumption is a way to express your beliefs (buying products and brands that does not use animals or chemicals, recycling, etc.). You support a variety of animal and environmental organizations with cash and in-kind donations and you may volunteer occasionally at an animal sanctuary

or to clean up a beach. You participate in actively boycotting companies using animal testing or polluting the environment. You engage actively with your friends to change their behavior and beliefs or practice yoga or meditation. Finally, you check the performance of your pension or savings through a vegan Exchange Traded Fund (ETF) that only trades shares of companies that do not use animals in their supply chain.

In other words, it is not only about aligning your values and beliefs with those of an existing organization and then delegating them - for instance Greenpeace or PETA - to decide what to do. It is so much more. It's also your daily life and behavior, including your consumption, that are aligned with what you believe in. And if an existing organization does not offer this level of action, that speaks to your own daily life, you create your own experience and your own 'organization'. In the post COVID-19 world, individual organized actions, often more rapidly and efficiently than traditional charities, mobilized alongside or in absence of food banks, environmental and civil rights organizations.

Obviously, like Amazon has not eliminated the need and the opportunity to buy a book in a real bookshop, equally giving money, volunteering, or participating in rallies are still practiced by millions. But there is a myriad of additional experiences we can live and create to support a cause in addition to or instead of just donating and volunteering.

4. There are several trends driving the evolving experience of donors and activists.

First, the detachment of individuals from institutions in general, fueled by a general decline of trust in governments, media, religions, and NGOs. In U.S., the trust in church/organized religion went from 65% to 36% in the last forty years. Charities and NGOs are seen like institutions or associated with "institutions" like governments. In general, nonprofits are often perceived as bureaucratic and not transparent, and this without even considering the cases which have hit the media in recent years on sexual harassment and racism affecting charities themselves. The Edelman Trust Barometer indicates that distrust for NGOs is even more evident and growing in countries like UK, Netherlands, Germany, Japan, and Italy. NGOs are less trusted than business in 11 countries!

Second, the digital transformation (especially the real time connection offered by mobile phones) offer immediate options to contribute. This explains why platforms like GoFundMe - who feature mostly individual stories - or Sleeping Giants - who boycott racist advertisement - are so successful. This same trend prompted the growth in donations for new organizations like RAICES or the National Women's Law Center early on, and their growth was based exclusively on digital donations.

The third trend is the redefinition of a sense of identity, or the "tribes" to which we belong. Seth Godin describes them as "a group of people connected to one another, connected to a leader, and connected to an idea". A tribe needs only a shared interest and a way to communicate. For example, instead of the traditional religions or political parties, K-POP is a stronger form of identity, comparing more to a religious sect or an NGO- that can mobilize fans for action even beyond immediate music interests. The obsession of

modern fundraising and marketing on audiences (and the lack of understanding of them) is an indication on how a supporter or a customer grouping is not only a cluster of say gender demographic traits and transactions (women, middle class, lapsed donor) but in addition, his/her behavior, beliefs and values are more important than other variables.

Finally, also through wider access to social media, ordinary citizens are empowered to act, reach out to others, raise money, and respond to needs before and in absence of governments and charities. COVID-19 has accelerated this trend: distributing food, helping with rent, producing face masks, preserving memories of people dying alone. In this sense, individuals take actions without permission or resources. Ordinary heroes take center stage and help without waiting for a charity or a government to step in. They do not need a brand, an apparatus, a platform, and they do not need to be an influencer. They have access to social media and, if they are authentic, their stories become mainstream media and reach an even larger public.

5. The real issue for all those who want to change the world is not to find the right emotion to secure a donation, but to build causes and organization that people love - like football teams, computer brands or K-POP bands. To do that we need to change the tools we use to understand why people are loyal or fall in love with brands, people and causes. We are obsessed in measuring the outcomes: how many people give to an appeal or how many view a TV ad; how much they give or how many times they click, or it is cost effective (the sacred ROI god). Instead, if happiness, trust and satisfaction are the drivers of identity and loyalty, like science and research indicate, we need to understand what tribes are made of, how we can understand and capture their identities and preferences and how we can use them to also drive donations and activism. Counting dollars/euros donated, Facebook Likes, or the signatures on a petition is limited and will not help us to succeed or survive in the complex world of good causes.
6. This book is the result of many things and people. First and foremost, the privilege to have worked in so many different parts of the world and more recently in Asia, Latin America, Italy, and in the United States with so many amazing organizations and people. Then the opportunity to interact with amazing scientists, researchers, and practitioners of various fields like economics, behavioral economics, customer care and experience (CX), marketing science and of course activists and fundraisers. In times of uncertainty and at the same time of social forces for solidarity and justice, it is essential than we move from the short term, immediate reward and dopaminergic cash and likes on Facebook, to a more long term serotonin driven actions where we understand and reward the experience and the identity of supporters.
7. This book is summarized by the magic words of Maya Angelou: "I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but **people will never forget how you made them feel**".

ⁱ <https://www.philanthropy.com/article/Coronavirus-Related-Giving/248729>